

Draft Ideas for N. Amherst Village Center Core J.Keller 06.24.15

Context and General Principles

Focus first on strengthening the Civic Core and N. Amherst Village village with a unique atmosphere and small town village scale that is both attractive and creates an attraction. Strengthen local businesses, residential neighborhoods, and unique N. Amherst assets: river, trails, working farms, historic assets.

Then design intersection improvements to support civic core, local businesses, residences, unique assets

Maintain existing zoning. Build any new student housing on UMASS perimeter land using public/private partnerships

Create N.Amherst Village Center that increases use of public facilities and patronage of local stores, services and restaurants.

1. Consider acquiring Potters and Sacco garages to create a site for riverside greenway, expanded library, shared parking, with restaurant or other appropriate business.
2. Create greenway with walking/bike path that connects the north west side of the River to conservation trails east of Mill River Recreation area.
3. Improve/expand library
 1. Add community center, restrooms, more space for seating, computers and books
 2. Enlarge site, include shared parking
4. Improve multi modal safety, accessibility, connections, amenities
 1. Add stop sign at Sunderland crosswalk
 2. Move Montague crosswalk farther north
 3. Re-stripe N. Pleasant Street with arrows:
 1. One arrow pointing bear right to Montague Rd./full right to Pine St.
 2. One arrow pointing bear left for Sunderland Road
 3. Add shared parking
5. Add bus shelter and pull off on Montague Road
6. Improve landscaping, circulation, signage, storefronts
 1. Put utility lines underground
 2. Install better looking lighting
 3. Paint bridges
 4. Add trees in and around intersection
 5. Add sidewalks on Montague, Cowls, Sunderland Roads
 6. Support Façade Improvements as outlined below

Support Façade Improvements

Modest improvement to buildings and landscapes in North Amherst Village core could create a traditional shopping street and village center that is both attractive and an attraction, thereby increasing pedestrian traffic, and merchants' success.

The potential of this area as a vibrant center is limited due to neglected buildings, under developed architectural design, and dated merchandizing. Small changes could make big improvements in pedestrian and shopping experience and sales.

On a retail street or shopping area, merchandise and services should be visible and inviting from the street or parking area. Small windows, high sills, and opaque window coverings are too common on Montague and Sunderland Roads. Planting is limited and low-level lighting is in too small an area.

In retail areas, increase transparency, lower sill height, add planters and pedestrian oriented signs, and replace signs. Add low-level lighting, awnings, cornices, and street furniture. Promote outdoor eating areas.

Additional ideas for Riverside Plaza: install coordinated paint scheme and signs for both sets of storefronts; remove guardrail; add easy care xeriscaping with shrubs and trees; create one way circulation through parking area, entering from the south and exiting from the north.



Illustration and concepts from Bessemer City Small
Area PlanDraft Small Area Plan for Downtown 04 - City of Bessemer City
bessemercity.com/form_doc_download.php?num=27

Vince O'Connor

Wednesday, June 24

at

Amherst Survival Cent

North Amherst residents who attend, especially those who are not regular civic participants, should be able to speak of all their concerns on matters related to these troublesome intersections.

The Meadow/Pine/North Pleasant intersection as currently configured is pedestrian and bicyclist friendly. Adding a turning lane on any of these streets to solve a 1 or 2/hour-a-weekday traffic problem would be unwise, potentially expensive, and out-of-character with area.

We also recommend trying the following low-cost traffic and pedestrian safety solutions, many of which would be functional permanently, before proceeding to disruptive, expensive land-taking alternatives.

1. Add a STOP Sign for the southbound lane on Sunderland Road just before the crosswalk to the library;
2. Move the Montague Road crosswalk to the library further north – closer to mall entry;
3. Stripe directional traffic lanes on the portion of North Pleasant Street north of the Meadow/Pine intersection and directly adjacent to the North Church – with a bear-right arrow directing traffic to Montague Road for the right lane, and a bear-left arrow directing traffic to Sunderland Road for the left;
4. Add pull-off and #33 bus shelter on Montague Road;
5. Plant trees on town right-of-ways near intersections;
6. Renew striping on approaches to these intersections at least 2-3 times a year so that students and visitors not familiar with North Amherst can use them safely.

Thank you. Please attend. Sincerely, Vincent O'Connor
Summer Street; 413/549-0810

Wednesday, June 24 – TODAY – 7-9 PM

at the

Amherst Survival Center on Sunderland Road

AMHERST BULLETIN A3

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Forum set for June 24 on North Amherst traffic

By **SCOTT MERZBACH**
Staff Writer

AMHERST – Four years after a day-long planning workshop focused on revitalizing the North Amherst village center, there will be a forum later this month for residents, commuters and other people interested in examining how traffic flows through the main intersection.

The forum from 7 to 9 p.m. June 24 at the Amherst Survival Center, 138 Sunderland Road, will focus on the area where Sunderland and Montague roads merge just north of the intersection of North Pleasant, Pine and Meadow streets.

This complicated intersection was identified as a major concern at that 2011 workshop.

Town Manager John Musante announced in April this would be first of several "community conversations" related to traffic in North Amherst.

The forum is sponsored by the Planning Board, Public Works Committee and the Select Board.

Senior Planner Christine Brestrup said the forum will include background on the design workshop led by The Cecil Group of Boston, reviewing the current conditions of the village center and discussing how the intersection can be improved.

Prominent buildings include the North Amherst Library, which is at the intersection of Montague and Sunderland roads and has only on-street parking for patrons, the Amherst Zion Korean Church and the former North Amherst School building that houses the Amherst Family Center.

While the Department of Public Works has created possible scenarios for changes at the intersection, these will not be presented yet, Brestrup said.

"The Planning Department is putting together some rough conceptual plans to get people's initial reaction to some ideas, but the thrust of the meeting will be to seek suggestions from the public about the area and to show schematic drawings at a later meeting," Brestrup said.

Library Director Sharon Sharry said she anticipates that library trustees will work with the town during the process of studying the intersection, adding that town officials understand the need for handicapped accessibility to the town-owned building and additional space for weekly storytimes.

More information about previous studies of the village center is available at www.amherstma.gov/northamherstintersection.

Scott Merzbach can be reached at smerzbach@gazettemet.com.

6/29/15

To the Select Board, Planning Department, Public Works, and Conservation Depts.

There was a good turn out at the N. Amherst Village Forum on Wednesday, bolstered by members of the major town Boards and Committees but not by local key players, namely the property owners of the 3 business lots that are directly affected and a representative from the North Church.

It is unfortunate that although copies of the Cecil Group summary were available, the highlighted, (more than 6 votes) suggestions were not reiterated to confirm their continued relevance as a basis for future discussion. This could have saved a lot of time for more meaningful disclosure of Town Government plans, revealed only in the four potential traffic solutions three of which contributed to, rather than ameliorating, the oft repeated desire of residents for a pedestrian friendly civic center and failing to contribute to the conclusion of the Cecil Group workshop that;

- a) *Future uses and development should primarily benefit the residents and business owners in N. Amherst.*
- b) *"The creative community, arts and culture have a multiplier effect on local economy and should have a big role in the future of N. Amherst."*

The year round residents of N. Amherst have not changed significantly. Apart from the recently closed DVD store, and the opening of the Laundromat, Riverside Plaza has remained stable as a useful if unattractive and hazardous, (for pedestrians) small business center. The positive changes listed by the Planning Department were outside the small civic center triangle where no improvements have been made following the Cecil Group recommendations. What has changed is the involvement of those residents closest to the village center, in town government. They diligently developed a vision for the area based on the Master Plan, the Cecil Group discoveries, current zoning and the rich resources, natural, historic and farming, enjoyed by the most diverse neighborhood in Amherst. 4 Precinct 1 vacancies were filled with active participants, 2 local residents are on the TMCC to promote education within Town Meeting government, and 2 are on the APSTC in their effort to promote the essential connection with nature in urban areas.

This Forum, focusing on the confusing, and potentially dangerous intersection between Montague and Sunderland Rds, did not give me confidence that neighborhood and town government objectives are aligned. Two suggested road plans carved the existing small civic center triangle into two smaller triangles separated by traffic and controlled by lights or a roundabout neither of which fit with a pedestrian friendly environment. Another option left the much used library in the middle of a one-way traffic loop! The low impact, inexpensive option that requires taking the tip of the library grounds to realign the intersection, moving a telephone pole, (or putting wires underground as in town), and painting directional lines on the pavement, is one that could and should be relatively easily and promptly implemented. It does not threaten the creation of an attractive riverside greenway adjacent to a small scale pedestrian friendly mixed use civic development with adequate shared parking and bus shelter/stop, suitable for this village.

Residents have openly shared their vision with the Town and with the other developer in the area, Cinda Jones. They lobbied for a fresh food market in the belief that other appropriate business development would be attracted by people who would stop and shop on a regular basis not just commute through N. Amherst with eyes on the road because nothing else attracts them. They supported her efforts to entice Atkins to the neighborhood, conceding important aspects of residential zoning to achieve this objective. However unless the Select Board is also open, about what it is they and the Manager want out of this process, including the potential financial resources and legal limitations to achieving any shared objectives, I fear this process is doomed to the same 'push back' that N. Amherst, Cushman, Gateway and down-town residential neighborhoods have been 'pushed to' in order to preserve their property investment and neighborhood communities.

Joe Sacco told me that the Town has made an offer to purchase his property. That this came *before* the public process was started, that the Planning Department did not know about it and that the Manager and Chair of the Select Board, both of whom were present at the Forum, did not elucidate when the question arose, is troubling in a process that requires, above all, *trust and communication between boards and the public* to arrive at a viable solution without further rancor. This requires that all those affected engage diligently, respectfully and creatively in the work required, giving full disclosure of financial opportunities and consequences of actions proposed by residents, business and town boards.

Melissa Perot

-----Original Message-----

From: Don Wise [mailto:dwise@geo.umass.edu]

Sent: Friday, June 26, 2015 12:15 PM

To: Brestrup, Christine; Richard Fein

Cc: Gray-Mullen, Oressa; DWise@geo.umass.edu

Subject: New Suggestions from North Amherst Meeting

Hi All,

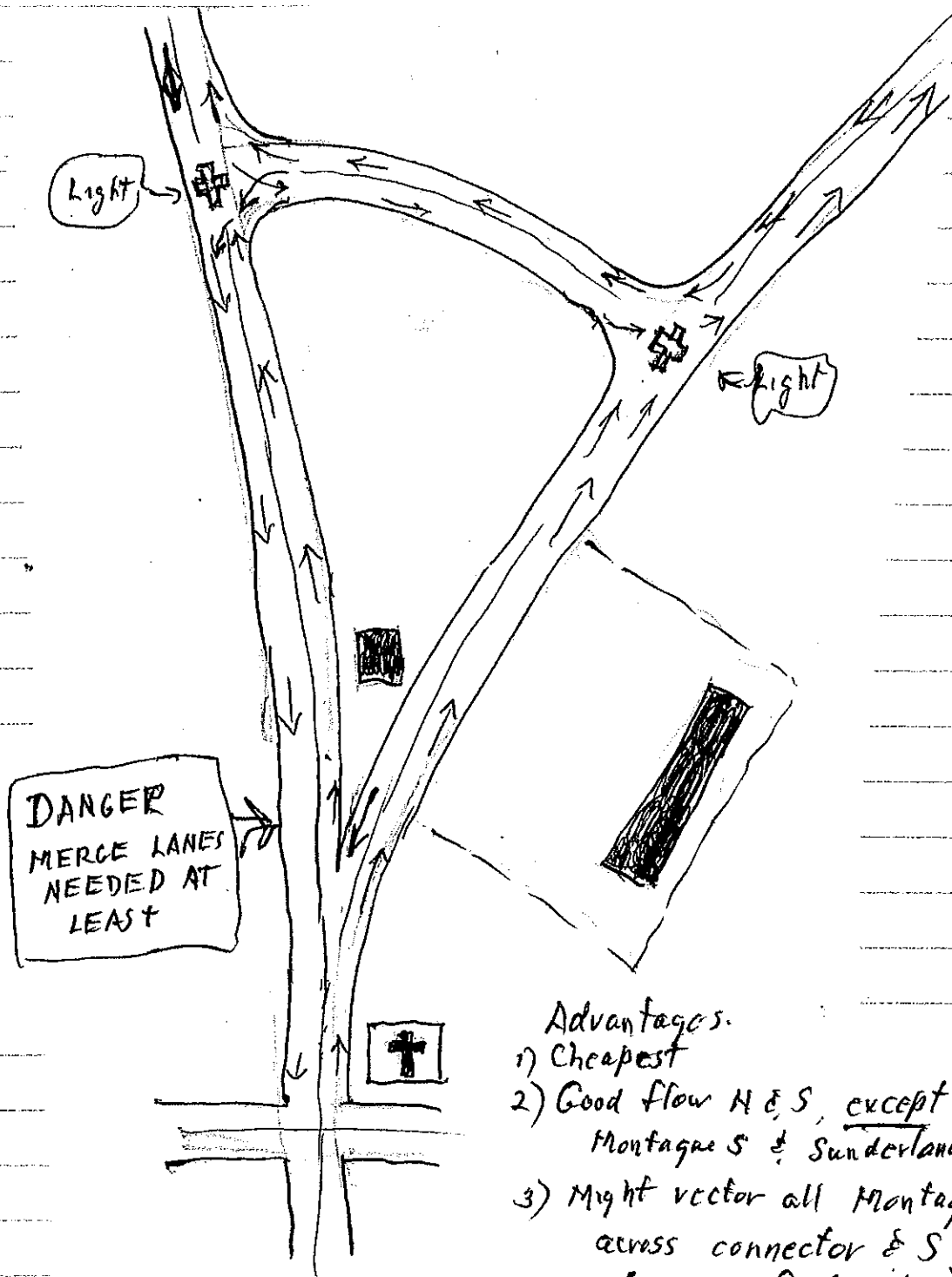
The one clear, new (?) suggestion I got at the Survival Center Meeting was from some guy with a Cows logo on his shirt.

- 1) He expressed concern by all the businesses in North Amherst about effects of traffic rerouting on their customers.
- 2) Proposed a simple two-way cross link between the two roads, along with stop signs or traffic lights at each end.

Attached is my understanding of his proposal along with a couple of variations. All have problems (That's news??)

Don Wise

Cow's Proposal from June 24, 2015 meeting (Expanded a bit.)



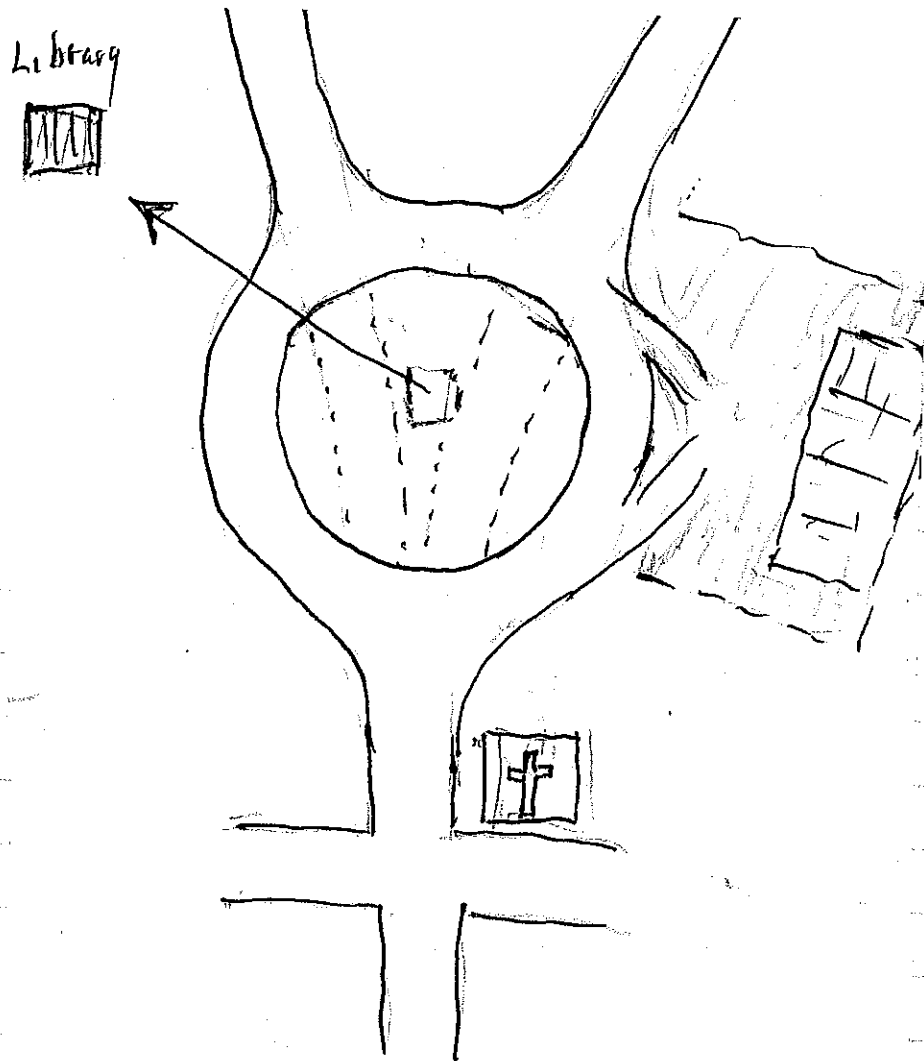
Advantages.

- 1) Cheapest
- 2) Good flow N & S, except for Montague S & Sunderland N
- 3) Might vector all Montague S flow across connector & S from there (See modified option)
- 4) Could put in a divider & merge lane along with yield signs.

June 25, 2015

#2

Move library & Traffic Circle Option

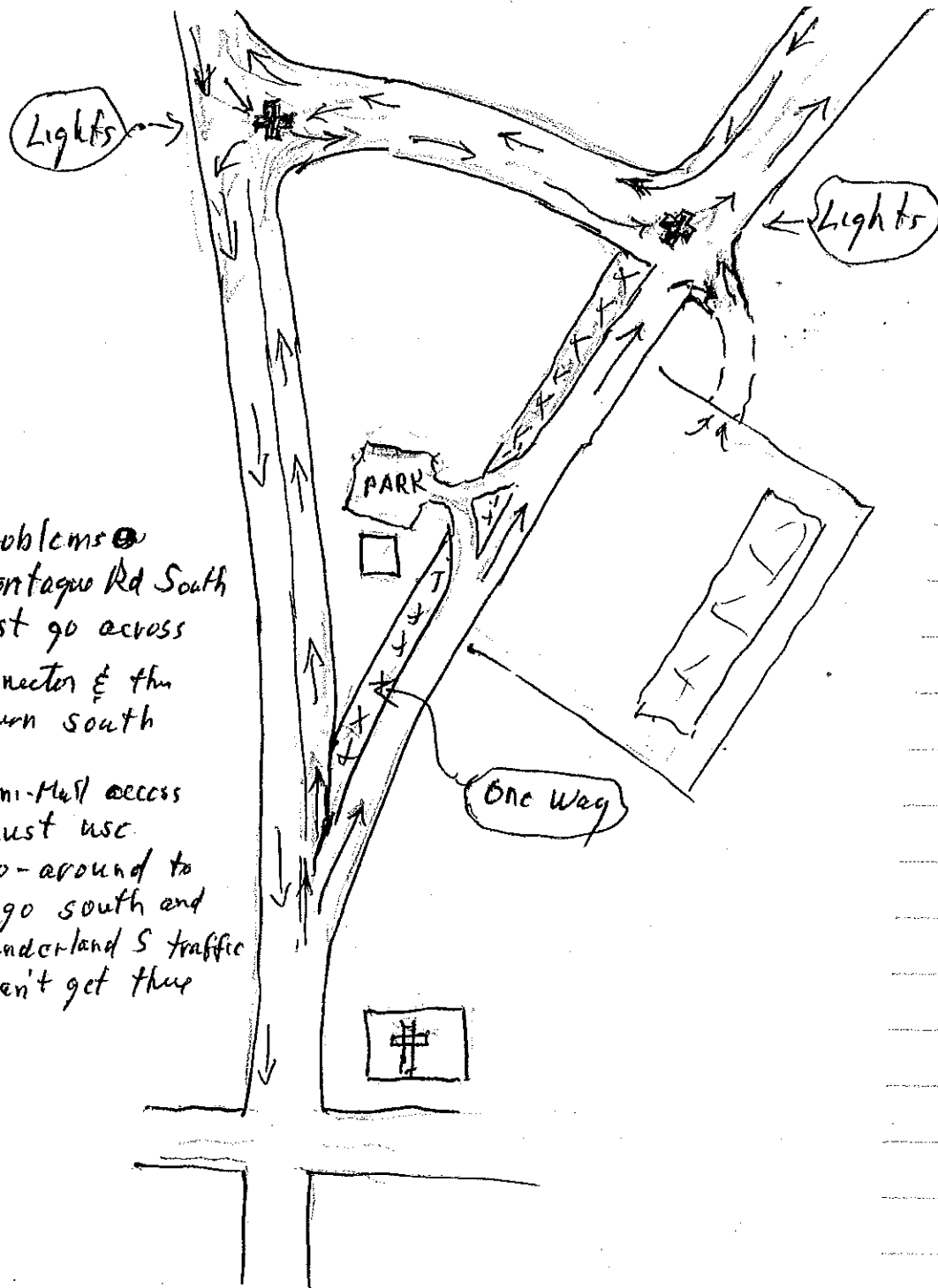


Problem - stop light back-up of south
flowing traffic would jam everything
on circle to a stop.

June 25, 2015

Modified Cowli's Option

#3



- Problems
- 1) Montague Rd South
Must go across
connector & then
turn south
 - 2) Mini-Hall access
must use
go-around to
go south and
sunderland S traffic
can't get there

From: Don Wise [mailto:dwise@geo.umass.edu]
Sent: Friday, June 26, 2015 4:10 PM
To: Brestrup, Christine; Richard Fein
Cc: Gray-Mullen, Oressa; DWise@geo.umass.edu
Subject: Upgraded Cowl Version

Hi again,

I had a few critical errors (like wrong-way arrows, etc.) on the version #2 sent an hour ago. Flush it !!!

Here is a better one. I'm uncertain how different it is from the giant loop (version B ?).

Problem is the library is really cut off from everything else. We could add a turn off into it and move the loop road a bit farther north. Or question ? How much would it cost to actually move it to the playing field area, preserve it and make it part of the green area next to the river ? If so, is there historical preservation money from somewhere to preserve it ?

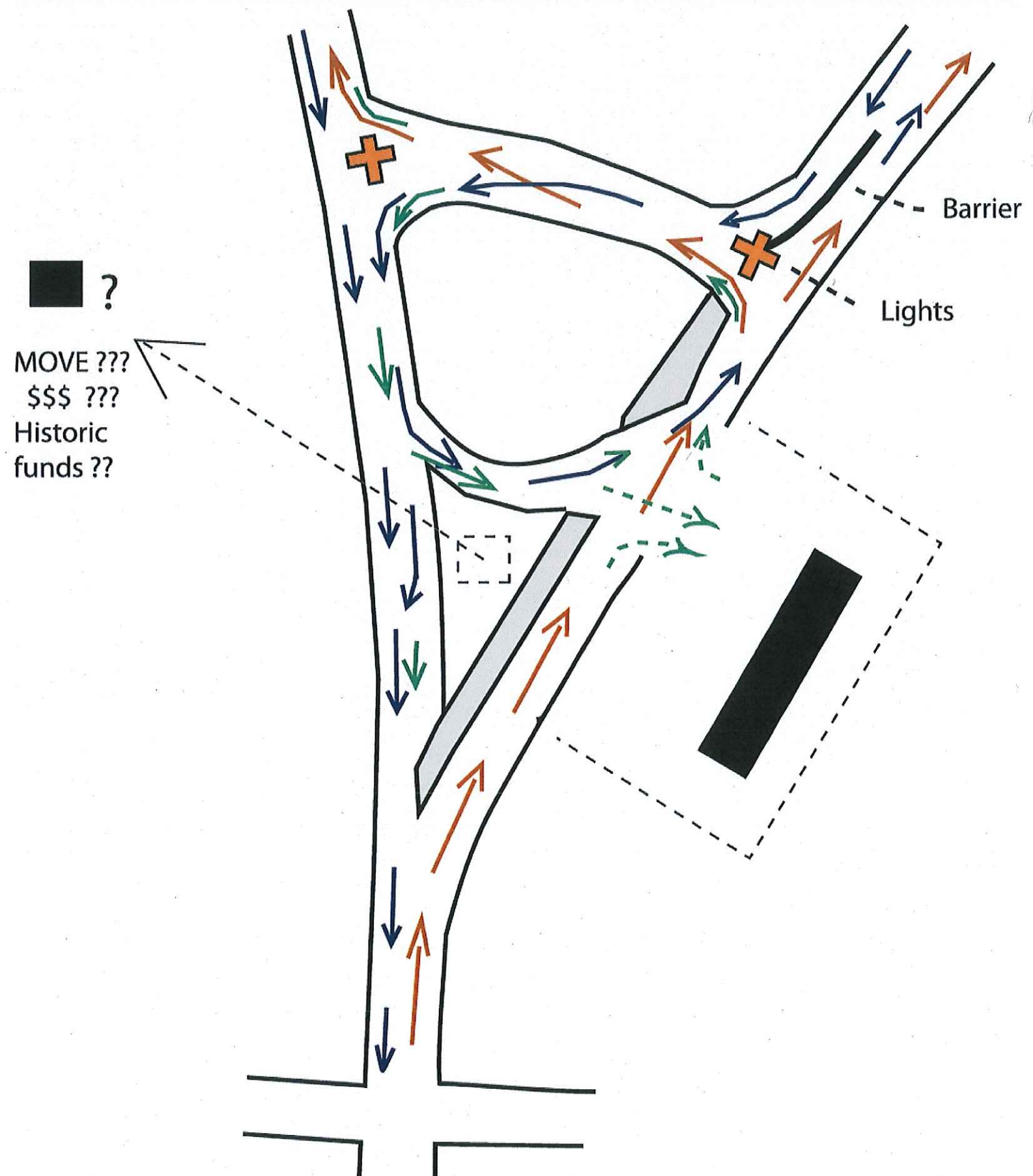
Just thinking of wild possibilities -- but isn't that our present mode ?

Cheers,

Don

and super -size rotary proposal

(DUW 6-26-15)



1. Focus **first** on strengthening Civic Core and N. Amherst Village as a semi-rural village with a unique atmosphere and appropriate small town village scale. Strengthen and local business, residential neighborhoods, and unique N. Amherst assets: river, trails, working farms, historic assets.

Then design intersection improvements to support civic core, local businesses, residences, unique assets

Put any increased residential density on UMASS perimeter using public/private partnerships

3. South Amherst Common and environs has benefitted from asset based planning and investment. N. Amherst has equally important assets and deserves similar targeted sensitive approach.
4. Public Private improvements to function and aesthetics of Civic Core
 1. Strengthen semi-rural feel and scale function of N. Amherst Village Center
 2. Maintain existing zoning
 3. Create greenway along river with walking/bike path that connects the north west side of the River to conservation trails east of Mill River Recreation area
 4. Improve/expand library
 1. Add community center, restrooms, more space for seating, computers, books
 2. Enlarge site, include shared parking
 3. Include restaurant in the greenway
 5. Improve multi modal safety, accessibility, connections, amenities
 1. Add stop sign at Sunderland crosswalk
 2. Move Montague crosswalk farther north
 3. Re-stripe N. Pleasant Street with arrows:
 - One pointing bear right/full right turn for Montague/Pine
 2. One pointing bear left for Sunderland Road
 4. More parking, shared parking
 5. Add bus shelter and pull off on Montague
 6. Improve landscaping, signage, storefronts Underground utility lines
 1. Prettier lighting
 2. Paint bridges
 3. Add trees in and around intersection
 4. Add sidewalks on Montague, Cows, Sunderland Roads

Brestrup, Christine

From: Ziomek, David
Sent: Tuesday, June 23, 2015 11:58 AM
To: Brestrup, Christine
Subject: North Amherst Meeting

FYI

David Ziomek
Assistant Town Manager/Director of
Conservation and Development
Town of Amherst
4 Boltwood Avenue
Amherst, MA 01002
Phone: 413-259-3122
Fax: 413-259-2410
Email: ziomekd@amherstma.gov

From: j bernotas [mailto:jim@amherstmachine.com]
Sent: Tuesday, June 23, 2015 11:55 AM
To: Ziomek, David
Subject: Meeting

Hi Dave,

I will probably not make it to the meeting tomorrow night as I have another meeting to attend, but I thought I would throw my idea into the ring.

- Leave all the roads where they are.
- Add a stop sign on Sunderland road parallel with the one on 63.
- Drop the speed limit on 63 at Cows and on Sunderland at the river to 20 with warning lights
- Enforce the one way traffic at the post office. Enter south driveway exit north driveway.
- When possible, acquire the former gas station and abutting Ernie's Towing properties.
- Then----
- Slide the library down to the river (and maybe expand it a bit) and make that area the riverfront park.
- Use the vacant areas to the north of the newly located library for parking.

This opens up the sight lines for traffic safety between 63 and Sunderland Rd. and makes the entire area more efficient.

Please consider that there are two costs to keep in mind- the cost to buy and the cost to own. The future maintenance costs need to be seriously considered during planning to prevent this project from becoming a burden later on.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments at any time, 413-695-4671

Regards, Jim B.

Jim Bernotas
Amherst Machine Co.
16 Cows Road
North Amherst Ma. 01059

Online Comment Submissions

<i>First Name</i>	<i>Last Name</i>	<i>Please share your thoughts with us about the North Amherst Village Center Intersection. Please focus your comments on the four concept plans for the Sunderland/Montague Road intersection.</i>	<i>Submission Date</i>
Marcy	Sala	<p>I am very much in favor of Option D. I think that gaining green space adjacent to the library, playing field and school would be a fabulous thing. I like that option much better than the gaining of green space to the east of the library in Option C. It seems that it would be awkward for traffic (especially truck traffic) coming off of Rt. 63 to have to take a right and wind around the library in order to continue south. In addition to the awkwardness of that configuration, the extra traffic it would generate on that end of Sunderland Rd. is not conducive to the civic nature of the adjacent spaces (library, playing field, school building).</p> <p>I very much dislike options A and B. Option A gains very little in terms of functionality and loses a bit of existing green space around the library (of which there is already very little). Option B is my least favorite as it puts the library in the middle of a rotary and has the same effect as Option C of increasing traffic in an area of civic use.</p> <p>So... my strong preference is for Option D.</p> <p>Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in!</p>	July 18, 2015
Anonymous		<p>I think the best plan for the North Amherst Village Center intersection is Option D because it reduces what is currently a double intersection down to one, while ensuring traffic flows past the commercial shopping center on Montague Road. Additionally, I hope that the section of Sunderland Road that will be abandoned in Option D can be turned into green space, allowing for expanded recreational and leisure space on that side of the library. Thank you.</p>	July 22, 2015